



Writing an Effective Press Release

As you prepare for the 19th annual **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, one of the most effective ways to spread the word about your activities is to write and distribute a captivating press release to the local media. The reason to issue a press release—sometimes called a news release—is to offer the media a compelling story to publish about **Recovery Month**, whether they attend your events or not. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight the importance of this campaign and raise awareness of treatment and the benefits of long-term recovery from substance use disorders.

Press Releases: Exciting, Targeted, and Comprehensive

Press Release Facts: Your press release should include information on your organization's most exciting event/activity for **Recovery Month**. If you are planning more than one event, consider sending out separate press releases for each, if they can stand on their own. Otherwise, send one press release along with a fact sheet describing all of the **Recovery Month** activities that you are planning and the target audiences for each event.

Some examples of newsworthy **Recovery Month** events are:

- Holding a run/walk that features a rally with speeches from people in long-term recovery and their families
- Convening a community panel to discuss the medical issues and science surrounding addiction
- Forming a council or task force to determine if the treatment and recovery needs of the community are currently being met by existing services, and what can be done to improve the availability of treatment programs and long-term recovery services
- Conducting a fundraiser featuring a local or national celebrity speaker
- Publicizing the local impact of a national news event, such as the **Recovery Month** kick-off event in Washington, D.C., and offering a local perspective to it
- Announcing the results of a poll or study on substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery
- Honoring local individuals or organizations with a grant or commemorative plaque for their efforts to help those with substance use disorders
- Planning an event to feature a local policymaker or official issuing a **Recovery Month** proclamation

Seven Writing Tips for Your Press Release

1. **Brand your release** – Use your organization's letterhead or the **Recovery Month** letterhead provided in this planning toolkit and on the Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. If using your own, remember to include the logos of the event's partnering organizations.



2. **Emphasize the most important details** – Begin with a headline in all CAPS that summarizes the release and engages the media. The first paragraph should answer the five basic questions about what you are publicizing for **Recovery Month**: who, what, where, when, and why.
3. **Be captivating, yet concise** – A press release should not be longer than three pages, and two-page releases that are short and to the point are preferable. If applicable, start with a one-sentence summary of your event. It should be a brief explanation about why your event is taking place, why it is relevant to your community, and why it is newsworthy. Reporters can see hundreds of releases a week, so make yours stand out. Remember to mention the theme of **Recovery Month 2008**, which is ***“Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery.”***
4. **Highlight local activities and facts throughout the release** – Local media outlets and audiences are most interested in what is happening in your community during **Recovery Month**. With that in mind, include local statistics about the number of people in your state or region who suffer from substance use disorders, as well as the number of families affected (if available), and quote experts with name recognition in the community. Contact your Single-State Agency (SSA) to find local statistics for your state or city. The contact information for all the SSAs can be found in the “Resources” section of this toolkit.
5. **Examine the language that you use** – Avoid using slang, acronyms, and/or jargon, and if necessary, give clear and concise explanations of complicated terms. Spell out acronyms the first time you use them, with appropriate abbreviations appearing in parentheses directly after. The abbreviation can be used after this point.
6. **State the facts, quote the opinions** – Opinions should be written in direct quotes **only**. The body of the release should be similar to a typical news article you read in your local newspaper; this will make it easier for the media to use the release. When quoting an individual in your **Recovery Month** release, it is essential to obtain his or her approval before distributing.
7. **Monitor for accuracy** – Be sure to verify all spelling, statistics, names, and titles in your press release.

Formatting Pointers: At the top of the first page, include the name, phone number, and e-mail address of a knowledgeable contact who will be readily accessible, able to respond to media questions, and can refer media to other spokespeople who can provide additional information. Begin the release with the name of your city and the date that the release is disseminated, similar to any story you would find in your local paper. If it is longer than one page, write “MORE” at the bottom center of each page; the end of the release should be marked by typing “###” centered below the last sentence.

Tools to help you customize your release include:

- **The press release template** at the end of this document can be adapted to fit the unique requirements of your event and organization. Make sure you edit the placeholders in the brackets as necessary. Electronic versions of these materials and other templates are available on the **Recovery Month** Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov.
- **The 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings**, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the premier source for the most up-to-date trends on substance use and treatment. This survey is available through the SAMHSA Web site at www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm.

- **Local statistics**, which can be obtained from the Single-State Agency (SSA) in your state, can help you customize your release even further. The press release template in this document gives you the option to fill in the placeholders with local information or use national statistics. If possible, try to seek out local information, as the media is more likely to publish something that is relevant to your specific community. Refer to the SSA Directory included in the “Resources” section of this toolkit. State and some local information are also available from SAMHSA. SAMHSA’s *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* provides national and statewide drug use statistics, the *National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services* profiles state treatment facilities, and the *Treatment Episode Data Set* is a resource for national and statewide demographic data, including commonly misused drugs. For more state and local information, visit <http://oas.samhsa.gov/geography.cfm>. Information on treatment facilities in your area can be found at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov or by calling 1-800-662-HELP.

How to Share a Press Release with the Media

For help with your press release distribution, follow the media list and distribution instructions in the “Media Advisory” document in this planning toolkit. Develop a media list of reporters who may be interested in covering the story and use it to distribute the press release the morning of the event.

Persistence is key. Make follow-up calls to encourage the media to write or produce a story, and also to attend the event. Try to schedule an interview with an official of your organization before your event to provide additional information and background on the subject and your organization. After your event, collect samples of any resulting media coverage to document your outreach efforts and use in additional promotional materials.

Distribution Pointers: You can distribute your release to local print, broadcast, and Internet media by fax or e-mail the morning of your *Recovery Month* event. Also, ensure that it is included in any materials you distribute at the event.

Share Your Activities and Successes

Share your *Recovery Month* plans and activities with SAMHSA and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), along with the general public. Post them on www.recoverymonth.gov to generate momentum for the campaign, which will touch millions of people who are affected by substance use disorders.

Share community success stories and other outreach efforts during *Recovery Month* by completing the “Customer Satisfaction Form” in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Share samples of your organization’s *Recovery Month* promotional materials with:

Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs
SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor
Rockville, MD 20857



About *Recovery Month* and Substance Use Disorders

- **Sample materials** from this kit are available electronically at the ***Recovery Month*** Web site at ***www.recoverymonth.gov***.
- **For additional *Recovery Month* information**, visit the Web site or call 1-800-662-HELP.
- **Substance use disorder, treatment, and recovery information** is available at SAMHSA's Web site at ***www.samhsa.gov***.
- **Information on treatment options in your area** and the special services available can be found at ***www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov***, a searchable database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE



MEDIA OUTREACH

[Please adapt as needed for your event.]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Name – *Must be a person who is available to answer questions from the media*]
[Phone Number – *Include cell phone number if the person is not always available at the office*]
[E-mail Address]

Sample headline: [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] TO HOLD 10TH ANNUAL 5K RUN/WALK TO CELEBRATE REAL PEOPLE IN RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

[(*Local number*) people in (*state or community*) / 22.6 million people nationally]
are affected by substance use disorders

[city, state], [date] – For the [(*local number*) people in (*state or community*) / 22.6 million people in the United States] who suffer from substance use disorders, asking for help and finding treatment is essential to getting back to a healthy, fulfilling life through recovery. In celebration of the [(*local number*) people in (*state or community*) / 4 million people nationally] who receive treatment and pursue recovery every year, [organization] is hosting the 10th Annual 5K Run/Walk for Recovery.

This community event highlights the stories of real people in [state or community] who have been affected by addiction and have made a step toward long-term recovery. [Organization] hopes that by bringing together the individuals, their families, and treatment providers who have helped them achieve recovery, they can further support and encourage others on a road to recovery.

“By assisting those in need of treatment onto a path of recovery, we not only aid them in regaining their lives, but also can help their families on a path of their own recovery from addiction’s impact, which will benefit the entire community,” said [name of a prominent local official], who will speak at the starting line about how community members can support people and affected family members seeking treatment for and recovery from substance use disorders. The event culminates in a rally, including a “Chain of Recovery” featuring participants who are in long-term recovery or have been affected by a substance use disorder in their lives connected to each other to visually show how addiction and recovery have touched so many peoples’ lives.

The 2008 *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)* theme is “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery*” and will celebrate those in recovery who have a renewed outlook on life and the treatment and recovery support providers who help them in treatment and recovery. *Recovery Month* is a nationwide celebration of people in long-term recovery from substance use disorders and their families, and is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Sponsored by [name and brief description of your organization], the 5K Run/Walk is part of this 19th annual observance of *Recovery Month*.

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“Treatment for substance use disorders is effective and necessary to sustain a healthy and productive society,” said **[spokesperson, title, organization]**. “Substance use disorders take an enormous toll on our community and it is time that we support those who need our help. Real people in our community are affected by substance use disorders. The renewed hope that springs from long-term recovery truly can make a difference in helping more families get healthy.”

[Organization name] Plans Myriad of *Recovery Month* Activities

Every September, ***Recovery Month*** spreads awareness of how important it is to make treatment accessible and to support those in recovery with a variety of events. This year, **[organization name]** has planned these additional ***Recovery Month*** events:

- **[A fundraising dinner]** will be held on **[date/time]** at **[location]** to raise money for new substance use disorder treatment programs for local residents and support programs for affected children, family, and friends. This event will feature **[speaker]**, whose personal story about how long-term recovery renewed **[his or her]** outlook on life inspires the entire community. Anyone from the community who is able may attend and contribute to the fund.
- Educational materials will be distributed **[explain where, how, and starting when, such as mailing date or a specific date at health fairs]** to help families, community members, employers, and faith-based organizations become more knowledgeable about substance use and mental disorders. The materials will provide information on treatment programs and community-based recovery support programs that are offered to employees, affected families, and friends.

About *Recovery Month*

During ***Recovery Month*** each September, communities across the country join together to help people recognize that substance use disorders are treatable diseases. Participating in treatment and/or recovery programs for substance use disorders is as effective as receiving treatment for other chronic conditions—yet nearly 21.1 million people needed but did not receive treatment at a specialty facility in the past year in 2006, according to the 2006 ***National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings***. One year after treatment, people report a significant reduction in their alcohol and drug use, increases in employment and income, and decreases in homelessness.

Throughout September, events nationwide encourage communities, civic leaders, employers, treatment and prevention organizations, faith-based organizations, and the recovery community to address the continued need for treatment, overcome the barriers that prevent people from seeking help, and ensure access to local treatment facilities.

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